

Farmers Helping Farmers

Ferry County

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Advisor brings knowledge to FSA committee

Two to three times a week Luanne Finley rides a horse from her ranch south of Inchelium to her family’s 77 head of cattle on nearby grazing land in the Confederated Tribes of the Colville’s Reservation.

Everything from those cattle, to the ground they farm hay on, to the equipment the Finley’s use was purchased with the help of Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans.

Because of her interactions with FSA through the loan process, Luanne became interested in giving back to the agency. That motivated her to run for and win a seat on the farmer and rancher populated FSA County Committee. She served three terms on the Ferry County Committee as a voting member, and now represents female and minority views on the committee as an advisor.

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The FSA county committee system provides a unique federal government experience: farmers and ranchers are elected by their peers to help FSA administer farm programs and provide an important source of information.

Committee members can serve a maximum of three consecutive three-year terms, which Finley has done. Now she serves as a minority advisor on the committee, representing female and Tribal interests. She is a descendant of a Colville Tribal member, and her husband is a Tribal member. She brings knowledge and expertise about Tribal Trustland, and issues relating to female and minority farmers to not only her own committee, but Washington FSA as a whole.

The FSA has a two-pronged mission: on one side it oversees a portfolio of programs dealing with disaster assistance, conservation practices, and revenue assistance. The agency also



Ferry County FSA Committee Advisor Luanne Finley.

makes loans to farmers and ranchers for annual operating expenses, purchasing or expanding agricultural operations and emergency loans to repair natural disaster damage.

The three-to-five person committees are the place that producers can appeal most agency decisions. Committees also make decisions which help to determine program payments. The committees meet approximately once a month. Voting in the election helps guarantee the committee is knowledgeable and truly represents the agricultural producers in each county.

The committee’s involvement with retaining or ensuring the continuance of the Ferry County

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FSA office has been a major accomplishment, according to Finley. When threatened with being absorbed into the Okanogan County office, several hours away, the committee worked to advocate for the office and the benefits to keeping it open. Their efforts paid off and the office has remained open, servicing the farmers and ranchers of Ferry County.

Each county committee draws its members from local administrative areas. Counties are broken up into administrative areas

for the purposes of voting. Local administrative areas encompass similar agriculture or geographic areas. Nominated by local farmers and ranchers, candidates must live in the county or local administrative area they will represent and must be eligible to vote in the county election. Members serve on staggered three-year terms so that one-third of the seats is up for reelection each year. Producers can serve for nine years. After more than 70 years, the county committee structure remains a cornerstone of FSA's efforts to preserve and promote American

agriculture, said Gary Breiler, Ferry County FSA Executive Director.

The committee nomination period runs through August 1, 2011. William Floyd is up for reelection this year, and he represents all the land in the county south of Township 35.

"I love going to the meetings and seeing how other members of the agricultural community are dealing with obstacles," Finley said.